

**Stefanie Baehr**  
**Senior Speaker Contest**

On this Graduation Day, May 17, 2008, we are gathered together to look towards the future, but also to reflect upon the years we have shared at our soon to be alma mater, Gwynedd-Mercy College. After today, each one of us will leave Gwynedd-Mercy College as a distinct Mercy graduate. Each one of our experiences throughout our years at Gwynedd Mercy College has been different from one another, but one thing ties us together, the Mercy values that have been instilled in each and every one of us.

Whether you are graduating today with an Associates Degree, Bachelors Degree or Masters Degree, you have experienced the values of Gwynedd-Mercy College in some way, shape, or form. The values of academic excellence, community and collaboration, compassion, competence, dignity of each person, integrity, rigorous intellectual inquiry, service, social responsibility, spirit of hospitality and valuing diversity have been an intricate part of our coursework, service experiences, and activities in and around our campus community.

Throughout our years here, our professors have opened our eyes to new ideas and possibilities for the future. We have learned to become inquisitive, learned individuals who strive to make not only the Gwynedd-Mercy College community a better place for all, but to also make the surrounding world we live in a better place as well. We all came to Gwynedd-Mercy initially for different reasons. Some may have come to our college for its small campus feeling, others for its location, or maybe to join one of our outstanding athletic teams. No matter what the reason was originally, we have all developed into a community of learners striving to make our world a better place for ourselves, our families, friends, and for the students of the future. Whether we are becoming teachers, nurses, psychologists, or business men and women, we will leave here today, different from when we first stepped onto campus.

My experience at Gwynedd-Mercy College has been one of a kind, as I am sure many of yours have been. Like many of you, my initial draw to GMC was because of its small campus feeling. No matter who I spoke to on campus, during tours or visitation days, I kept hearing the phrase, “you are more than a number on campus at Gwynedd-Mercy”. I heard this phrase from students in the residence halls, on sports teams, and in organizations all over campus. This phrase stayed with me throughout my four years at Gwynedd and will remain with me for years to come. Coming from a small high school, I knew I wanted to feel apart of something, where, as I had heard so many times before, I was not just a number. I wanted a campus where my fellow students, staff members, and faculty got to know me for who I was. From my first day of class freshmen year, when I stepped into a religion class full of seniors, I felt like they knew me as Stefanie Baehr and not Student ID # 00002-7914.

From the first day of class on, I knew that I was apart of something and not simply a visitor. I knew that when people visited campus and asked me about my

experience at Gwynedd-Mercy College, I could, like so many had before me, say, on campus at Gwynedd-Mercy College you are more than a number, you are a member of a campus community that supports one another in times of sadness and in times of joy.

In order to give back to the college community that I had become a part of, I, like many students on campus, was looking for more than just going to classes. Of course, I wanted to achieve academic excellence but I also wanted to experience all that Gwynedd had to offer. I wanted to join committees and activities that would spark new ideas around campus that benefited all members of our college campus. Over the past years, we have seen changes across campus, which were initiated by students just like me and you. One of those changes can be seen right here and now, a student speaker at our commencement ceremony, something Gwynedd-Mercy College is experiencing for the very first time. Our hard work and dedication within campus organizations, committees, and athletic teams has made Gwynedd-Mercy into what it is today. Gwynedd-Mercy has developed into something we can all leave feeling proud of. As I look out into the 2008 graduating class, I see PAC Champions, resident assistants, student government members, Voices of Gwynedd singers, and students involved around campus in organizations such as Best Buddies, the Black Student Union and the Education Club. We, the students of Gwynedd-Mercy College have made our college into what it currently is. We have all left an impression in our majors, sports teams, campus activities, and residence halls. We have made a difference.

Besides giving back on campus, I, like many of you, wanted to experience giving back to others in our surrounding world. From my experiences on campus I found out how important it is to be a humanitarian. I found service opportunities through my involvement on campus within Alternative Spring Break, our National Mercy Honor Society, Sigma Phi Sigma, and the Student Government Association.

Many of you in the audience today have been a part of Alternative Spring Break and understand what an eye opening experience it is. The group of students and staff members that I traveled with to St. Michaels, Arizona in the spring of 2005 all had a common goal, helping those less fortunate, similar to the ways of our role model, Catherine McCauley. In St. Michaels, Arizona, we were given the opportunity to work with students with disabilities on a Native American Reservation. During service experiences such as this one, students, like me, grow as individuals. We experience things we could never imagine experiencing. Whether you have attended Alternative Spring Breaks trips to Arizona, Ohio, or Texas, volunteered with Habitat for Humanity building houses for those in need, attended a fundraiser on campus such as the annual Movie Marathon or Laughs for Lives to benefit children with Juvenile Diabetes and wounded military men and women, or donated to one of the many tables set up in St. Bernard's Lobby, you have all experienced service in some way, shape, or form.

We have experienced extremely joyous times on campus at Gwynedd-Mercy over the past few years but there have been instances where we have all joined together as a campus community in times of sadness. In late August 2005, our country was changed by the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Ever since this day, we have joined together as a

college community on an annual basis to celebrate the history of the New Orleans area and raise money to help our fellow Americans who are still struggling to get back on their feet. By attending our annual Mardi Gras festivities or being given the opportunity to travel down to the “big easy”, we are able to show our support for those whose lives were changed forever by one storm. More recently, last spring, campuses around the country were changed forever. The crimes at Virginia Tech propelled our community to come together to pray for those who lost their lives and for those who lost loved ones. These incidents over the past years have changed our lives and the lives of all Americans. By being apart of such a tight knit community, we were able to rely on one another for support during these trying times. As we prepare to leave Gwynedd-Mercy College and enter the so called, “real world”, we can always remember that we have a family to return to and rely on in a time of need.

I have found throughout my years at Gwynedd-Mercy that we join together as a community when the world around us is in a time of turmoil. We join together to show our support of those around us. By being apart of this, on campus throughout the years, I believe that each and every one of us has grown into an individual that acknowledges the world around us. Gwynedd-Mercy College has taught us that we can make an impact on our society, no matter what field we may chose to enter into. Everyone graduating today has made a difference in our world and will continue to make a difference after graduation.

Now, as we embark on our lives in the surrounding world, we look back to the years we have shared at Gwynedd-Mercy College. Every single one of us has changed throughout our college experience. We are not the same individuals that stepped onto Gwynedd Mercy’s campus years ago. As I look out into the graduating class of 2008, I see a group of individuals that are ready to change the world for the better.

My advice for all of you today is to take what you have learned from your professors, advisors, and fellow students and make a difference. Make a difference in the world that you have been a part of for so many years. Take your knowledge of nursing, teaching, psychology or the business world and change things for the better.

We are all individuals, even though we may not appear to be very individualistic today, as we all sit here wearing the same cap and gown, but we are all individuals who are prepared, as Mercy graduates to be successful from this day forward. No matter what you were involved in on campus, whether you were on the baseball team, a member of the student government association, or the black student union, you have all made a difference already on campus and will soon begin to make a difference off campus.

What I see from up here is opportunity; opportunity to take the values that have been instilled within each and every one of us over the past years and achieve in each of our chosen professions. Remember always, as you embark into your individual futures, that we all have a connection, we are all, distinctive Mercy Graduates who have learned that is a necessity to achieve academic excellence in all aspects of our lives. We have learned that it is essential to create a community that is capable of collaborating to make

our world a better place. We have learned to always be compassionate, competent, and understand the dignity of each person that we meet in our journeys. Always remember, no matter where your path may lead you, to have integrity, achieve rigorous intellectual inquiry and serve others, while understanding our social responsibility. No matter where your path may lead you, have a spirit of hospitality and always value diversity in every person you encounter within your lifetime. I leave you today with a quote from Elaine Maxwell, “my will shall shape the future. Whether I fail or succeed shall be no man's doing but my own. I am the force; I can clear any obstacle before me or I can be lost in the maze. My choice; my responsibility; win or lose, only I hold the key to my destiny.”